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ABSTRACT

This digest discusses ways in which high schools and community colleges can cooperate in order to support more successful student transitions. The digest describes five types of collaborations that achieve this goal: (1) K-16 partnerships; (2) dual credit programs; (3) tech prep programs; (4) middle college high schools; and (5) distance learning programs. These partnerships encourage development of inter-institutional student services, such as new student orientations and professional development for counselors. Many state initiatives for educational reform have targeted dual credit, dual enrollment, or concurrent enrollment programs to enable high school students to earn college level credit in course work offered at the high school or community college. Lessons learned from past collaborations include: (1) student transitions are enhanced by creating structural bridges between community colleges and secondary schools; (2) the social, political, and economic realities unique to each educational sector must be honored in order to develop effective partnerships; and (3) it is important to build and implement a common agenda for high schools and community colleges that will improve student success at all levels. Contains 11 references. (JA)

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Digest

November, 2000 EDO-JC-00-11

Successful Collaborations between High Schools and Community Colleges

By Pam Schuetz

With a "baby boom echo" fueling national growth in the number and diversity of high school graduates, school systems and colleges are increasingly pressed to work together to prepare students for the demands of higher education and the labor force. Currently, over half of all high school graduates enroll in a community college within one year of graduation (Palmer, p. 94). High schools have different governance structures, organizational cultures, and assessment standards than community colleges; lack of coordination between these educational sectors impedes successful student transition (Boswell, p. 5). The Fall 2000 volume of New Directions for Community Colleges describes five types of collaborations that support more successful student transitions: K-16 (kindergarten through baccalaureate) partnerships; dual credit programs; tech prep programs; middle college high schools; and distance learning programs.

K-16 Partnerships

State policy makers increasingly place a high priority on creating K-16 partnerships that align curricula, match student progression from one grade level to the next through demonstrated mastery of specific skills or knowledge, and coordinate testing requirements from elementary school through college (Boswell, p. 3). These partnerships also may encourage development of inter-institutional student services, such as new student orientations and professional development for counselors (Watson, pp. 55-57). Maryland, Georgia and Ohio, among other states, have developed significant statewide K-16 partnerships (Boswell, p. 12).

Maryland has established six types of collaborations between schools and higher education institutions: (1) professional development at all levels; (2) fieldwork within and outside schools; (3) early intervention; (4) continuing education and teacher training; (5) job training and tech preparation; and, (6) distance learning. Maryland's K-16 initiative includes recommendations regarding assessment, sequencing of curricula, and community involvement. (Outcalt, p. 107; Boswell, p. 12).

Georgia's regional and local educational consortia link the otherwise disparate educational bureaucracies of P-12 (preschool through 12th grade) and postsecondary education by coordinating school boards, community members, and legislative and business leaders. Georgia's P-16 initiative seeks to improve student achievement at all levels, facilitate student transitions, improve postsecondary access for minority and low-income students, and focus teacher preparation and professional development programs on meeting high standards for every student. The Ohio Learning Extension Network links the K-16 community, builds a common agenda through a partnership council of state and higher education board members, and targets or reallocates existing fiscal resources in support of changes that will improve student success at all levels (Boswell, p. 12).

The custodial function of the K-12 system fosters very different institutional environments than the life-long learning adult function of community colleges. Their different constituencies, organizational cultures, values, and purposes and functions can interfere with collaborative efforts. Challenges that may arise include: resistance or lack of coordination at administrative, departmental, program and/or instructional levels; poor communication with parents or between bureaucracies; lack of student interest; and difficulty coordinating allocation of resources between organizations (Azinger, pp. 19-20; Nunley, Shartle-Galotto and Smith, p. 69).

Dual Credit and Concurrent Enrollment Programs

Many state initiatives for educational reform have targeted dual credit, dual enrollment or concurrent enrollment programs to enable high school students to earn college level credit in course work offered at the high school or community college. These programs may be part of a larger effort to sequence secondary and postsecondary education curricula, or may simply offer advanced placement courses to high school students.

Missouri, Illinois, Virginia, North Dakota, and Florida offer dual credit college courses, taught by college faculty in a high school setting for high school credit and/or advanced placement credit for college. Other states offer concurrent or dual enrollment programs that allow eligible high school students to take community college courses at the local college for credit. This type of partnership may broaden and enrich the high school's curriculum without the expense of hiring additional staff or finding additional teaching space (Andrews, pp. 34-35).

While expanding advanced course offerings to students and allowing them to earn college credit has enormous benefits, there are some structural challenges involving organization, administration, and funding. Administrators should implement a checklist of strategies that minimize potential legal problems that can arise when high school students enroll in college courses or when college staff work within high schools. Standards should be developed to ensure academic quality and transferability of classes, and funding procedures should be examined to avoid charging taxpayers twice for the same enrolled

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student (Boswell, p. 10; Azinger, pp.19-20; Lugg, p.90). Principles of good practice for dual credit programs require colleges to articulate clear and uniform expectations regarding (1) student eligibility; (2) program structure and administration; (3) faculty qualifications and support; (4) assessment of student performance; and (5) transferability of credit (Andrews, pp. 34-35).

Tech Prep and '2+2+2' Programs

Tech prep offers high school students a well articulated, rigorous course of study from the last two years of high school through a two-year (2+2) or sometimes four-year (2+2+2) college degree, directed toward learning for and about technologically focused careers. The six core components of successful teach prep initiatives offer a model of reform for both high schools and community colleges: (1) formal articulation strategies; (2) rigorous and engaged learning; (3) meaningful linkages between theory and practice; (4) outcomes-focused curriculum; (5) access and opportunity for all students; and (6) longevity through collaboration (Bragg, pp. 23-26).

Tech prep programs appear to offer important outcomes for students and foster stronger linkages between high schools, colleges and employers. Preliminary results of a longitudinal study show that the majority of tech prep participants in eight regions of the United States have engaged in substantial academic and technical course work at the secondary level and moved on to two-year or four year colleges at very high rates (Bragg, pp. 24-25). Implementation continues to evolve slowly due to a lack of coordination between high schools and colleges in financing and structuring programs, in developing sequential, articulated curriculum, and in implementing appropriate changes in instructional pedagogy and academic standards (Bragg, pp. 25-26).

Middle College High Schools

Middle college high schools (MCHSs) are high schools fully housed on community college or university campuses. Representatives from high schools, community colleges, and the community collaborate to develop the middle college's mission, curriculum, and learning frameworks – and are involved in ongoing MSHS governance structures.

Students identified as "at-risk" by their teachers and counselors attend MCHSs, and are encouraged to succeed at high school and go on to higher education or advanced training through peer modeling (students enrolled at the college), small classes, and superior academic support services. Student assessments from MCHSs over the last twenty-five years have documented improved school attendance, grade point averages, graduation rates, transfer rates and job placement rates (Cunningham and Wagonlander, pp. 41-42). Establishing and sustaining middle college high schools depends upon successful collaboration, shared governance, communication, administrative support and visionary and energetic leadership (Cunningham & Wagonlander, p. 51).

Distance Learning

Distance education technology offers new opportunities for school-college collaborations. Kentucky recently created the Virtual High School to offer advanced math, science, and language courses to high school students statewide. Classes will be offered online and supplemented by video and CD-ROM. Kentucky intends to purchase courses from distance-education companies and institutions in order to prepare students for compliance with new in-state college and university admissions requirements. Other states, including Colorado, Pennsylvania, Utah, and California, are establishing electronic community college systems. Many states reward cooperation and collaboration between state distance-education efforts to help avoid costly course duplication while providing another bridge between high school and community college systems (Boswell, p. 11).

Conclusion

Lessons learned from these five types of collaborations are as follows: (1) student transitions are enhanced by creating structural bridges between community colleges and secondary schools, aligning curriculum and testing requirements, and offering dual credit or concurrent enrollment opportunities; (2) the social, political, and economic realities unique to each educational sector must be honored in order to develop effective partnerships; (3) it is possible, and important, to build and implement a common agenda for high schools and community colleges in support of changes that will improve student success at all levels. (Palmer, p. 13; Azinger, p.20, Watson, 53-58).

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This digest is drawn from "How Community Colleges Can Create Productive Collaborations with Local Schools." *New Directions for Community Colleges*, Number 111, James C. Palmer, Ed., San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Fall, 2000.

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